

Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus (dubius) ayresi* sightings in Cameroon

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De nouvelles observations de l'Aigle d'Ayres *Hieraaetus (dubius) ayresi* au Cameroun sont rapportées. En 1998, l'espèce a été vue huit fois dans le sud-ouest du pays. L'auteur estime que certaines mentions de l'Aigle de Cassin *Spizaetus africanus* de cette région pourraient concerner des Aigles d'Ayres. Ce dernier passerait plus de temps à découvert et serait, de ce fait, plus à même d'être observé. Il a les ailes plus longues, la queue plus courte et barrée de gris, les axillaires uniformément noires, et deux petites taches blanches à la base de l'aile.

The status of Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus (dubius) ayresi* in Cameroon is considered uncertain⁵. Recently, however, records of singles in Lobéké reserve, in the east of the country (*Bull. ABC* 5: 70), near Ngaondaba (N Borrow pers comm), and of two at Mt. Kupe¹ have been reported. There are also records from neighbouring Nigeria, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo²⁻⁴.

During month-long raptor fieldwork in south-west Cameroon (encompassing visits to Nyasoso, Mt. Kupe, Korup National Park, and Mt. Oku), in January 1998, I made eight separate sight records of *H. ayresi* (Table 1). It is possible that two of these involved the same adult; nevertheless, the species would appear to be a rather common raptor in this area.

The eagles varied in plumage coloration from a whitish juvenile (one, Figs 1 & 2) to medium dark (5–6, Figs 3–5) to dark (one) adults. All adults exhibited the two white 'landing lights' at the base of the forewing (see Fig 3).

None of the birdwatching trip reports I used for reference materials for my visit mention *H. ayresi*. However, they did mention frequent sightings of Cassin's Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus africanus*. I did not identify *S. africanus* during my fieldwork period, despite watching for it on at least eight full days in areas where this eagle has been reported. I do not doubt that *africanus* is present, but the frequency of my sighting *H. ayresi* and the fact that this species had not been reported previously suggest that

some of the alleged sightings of Cassin's may have been Ayres' Hawk-Eagle. A record of African Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster* on Mt. Kupe in January 1994 (unpubl. trip report), must surely have been an *H. ayresi*.

Observers in south-west Cameroon and elsewhere in central African rainforests are advised to look carefully at any possible *S. africanus* to ensure that it is not an *H. ayresi*. I suspect, because of the aerial nature of the last-named species (a habit not shared by *africanus*), that *ayresi* is likely to be more frequently observed. *H. ayresi* is an aerial hunter and spends much of the day on the wing, whereas *africanus* limits its flying to occasional soaring for short periods, behaviour similar to many *Accipiters*, and to low-level flights to change watchpoints.

The main differences between the two species are: (1) their proportions—*ayresi* has longer wings and a shorter tail; (2) their uppertails—barred grey on *ayresi* and brown on *africanus*; (3) their axillaries—uniformly black on *africanus*, and speckled black-and-white on *ayresi*; and (4) the two white 'landing lights' on the inner forewings—present on *ayresi* (Fig. 3), absent on *africanus*.

I prefer the name 'Ayres' Eagle' to 'Ayres' Hawk-Eagle' as the latter implies a forest eagle that behaves like a hawk, as is the case with members of the genus *Spizaetus*, but this name is inappropriate for *H. ayresi* and other aerial eagles in *Hieraaetus*, such as Booted *H. pennatus*, Rufous-bellied *H. kienerii*, and Little Eagles *H. morphnoides*.

The author would be very interested to receive any photographs of *S. africanus*, especially of birds in flight. These can be sent to the address below (see also p. 92).

Table 1. Sightings of Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi* in Cameroon in January 1998

Area of sighting	Date	Age	Plumage
Tombel	1 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark
Nyasoso	3 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark
5 km south of Nyasoso	4 January 1998	Juv	Light
1 hour east of Kumba	6 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark
North of Loum	20 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark
Nyasoso	21 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark
Lake Barombi	23 January 1998	Ad	Dark
Buea	25 January 1998	Ad	Medium dark

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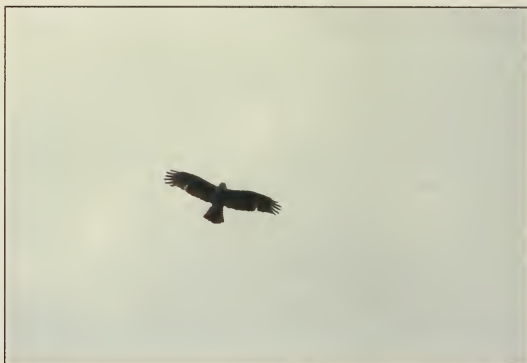
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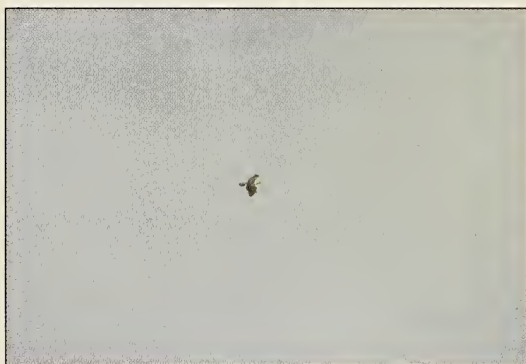
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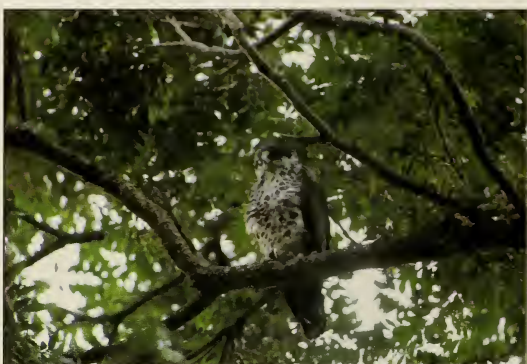
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1. Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi*. Most likely a juvenile because of the completely white head; tawny-buff head and underparts that have faded to whitish. Note long wings and short tail. Cameroon, January 1998 (Bill Clark)
2. Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi*. Most likely a juvenile because of the completely white head. Cameroon, January 1998 (Bill Clark)
3. Adult Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi*. Note white 'landing lights'. Cameroon, January 1998 (Bill Clark)
4. Adult Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi*. Note long wings, short tail, and mottled axillaries. Cameroon, January 1998 (Bill Clark)
5. Adult Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresi*. Wing-tips almost reach tail tip. South Africa, November 1998 (Bill Clark)